



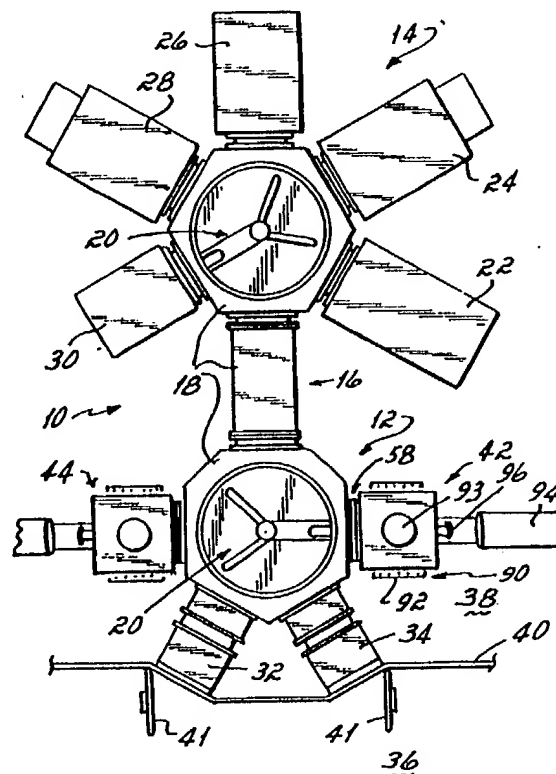
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(54) Title: WAFER PROCESSING CLUSTER TOOL BATCH PREHEATING AND DEGASSING METHOD AND APPARATUS

(57) Abstract

A wafer processing cluster tool (10), having one or more loadlocks (32, 34), is provided with one or more batch preheating modules (42, 44) that receive wafers only from the cluster tool transport module (12, 14) at the internal vacuum pressure of the machine. The loading, unloading, handling and processing of wafers in the machine can occur while other wafers are being preheated. The preheat module has a vertically moveable rack (64) and is loaded with various sized batches of wafers with no vacant positions between them. Wafer shaped shields may occupy positions adjacent top and bottom wafers to cause them to heat the same as other wafers in the rack. Infrared lamps (90) positioned outside of quartz windows (60) heat wafers in the preheat module. The rack may rotate to improve heating uniformity. Temperature sensors (93, 94), such as pyrometers, that do not contact the wafers being preheated, measure temperature for control of the heating of the lamps.



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**WAFER PROCESSING CLUSTER TOOL BATCH PREHEATING
AND DEGASSING METHOD AND APPARATUS**

The present invention relates to the processing of wafers such as semiconductor wafers, and, more particularly, to the removal of surface and absorbed impurities such as water vapor and other gasses from silicon wafers preliminary to the coating or etching thereof. More particularly, the present invention relates to preprocessing by preheating of wafers being individually processed in modular processing systems such as cluster tools.

Background of the Invention:

The presence of gases on the surfaces of or contained within silicon wafers during the performance of coating or etching processes on the wafers is becoming a problem of increased importance in the manufacture of integrated circuits and semiconductor devices. As devices become smaller and the manufacturing process more precise, the presence of molecules of vapor on the surfaces that are to be coated or etched is emerging as a significant contributor to the

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production of defective devices. When coating and etching processes are performed, for example, by sputtering, any foreign particles on the surface being processed can result in a microscopic area that escapes the process. Accordingly, an essential circuit path or electrical characteristic of the device on which the affected area lies may be defective and the device unusable.

Gases such as water vapor are typically present on the surfaces of the wafers and are contained within the bodies of wafers when the wafers are introduced into processing machines, which typically contain a sealed vacuum environment. During the course of the coating or etching processes performed on a wafer, heat is often applied to the wafer or is generated by the performance of the process itself, or both. Sputter coating and etching processes, chemical vapor deposition process (CVD), and other physical or chemical coating and etching processes, performed with or without plasma, frequently require the wafer substrate to be elevated to temperatures of, for example, 500°C or 1000°C for the process to proceed optimally. Without subjecting the wafers to deliberate heating, the physical and reactive processing of the wafer surface usually generates heat that will elevate

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the temperature of the wafer itself to, for example, 600°C. As a result, water molecules embedded in the silicone of the substrate may be released and may locate on the surface being
5 processed, shielding an area of the surface from the coating or etching process, or reacting with the processing gasses.

It has been recognized that gasses and water vapor can be removed, at least in part, from
10 the wafers by heating or baking the wafer at some elevated temperature in a vacuum for a specified period of time. This specified period of time may be many times longer than that required for the complete processing of the wafer in a particular
15 apparatus.

In processing machines such as cluster tools, a plurality of different and randomly accessible processing modules are connected to a common wafer handling or transport module, in which
20 the wafers are maintained continuously at a vacuum pressure level, and into and out of which the wafers are transferred to and from an external atmospheric pressure environment through one or more load-locks. In wafer processing, pretreating
25 of the wafers to eliminate contaminates, to be effective, must take place after the wafers are sealed in the internal vacuum environment from

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which they will not be removed prior to processing.
In such cluster tools, the preheating of wafers for
the time necessary to rid them of gasses and other
dissolved contaminants is a step that will often
5 seriously reduce the productivity or through-put of
the machine.

In U.S. Patent No. 4,923,584, there is
disclosed a provision for heating batches of wafers
while held in load-lock or cassette modules of a
10 wafer processing cluster tool, for the purpose of
removing absorbed contaminants from the wafers. In
such a device, a batch of wafers would be loaded
into the load-lock through the load-lock door while
the load-lock is opened to the atmosphere. When
15 the load-lock is sealed and pumped to a vacuum, the
batch of wafers is heated. When the heating is
complete, the load-lock is opened to the interior
of the cluster tool and the wafers are individually
removed from the load-lock and one-by-one
20 transported to the various modules for processing.
In the device of this patent, two load-locks are
provided, allowing one to be loaded or unloaded
while the other is subjecting a batch of wafers to
prolonged heating. The preoccupation of one of the
25 load-locks of a two load-lock machine for prolonged
preprocessing, however, deprives the machine of the
loading and unloading flexibility for which the two

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load-locks were provided, resulting, in some cases, in delays in the operation of the machine.

Provision for batch heating in a load-lock, however, presents several problems. Industry
5 standard cassettes for use in wafer processing cluster tools are usually made of a plastic such as polypropylene. Ideally, a cassette, preloaded with wafers, is positioned in the load-lock from the outside and sealed with the wafers in the load-
10 lock. Such plastic materials will not, however, withstand the temperatures needed for effective preheating to remove gasses from the wafers. Therefore, the above identified patent proposes employment of a metal rack or holder within the
15 load-lock. Such a rack must either replace the standard cassette or be loaded with the wafers from the cassette at the lock. Metal wafer holders, however, are, in some situations, prone to contaminate wafers as metal atoms propagate from
20 the holder into the wafer at or near the points of where the rack contacts the wafers. In that the load-locks are usually loaded and unloaded manually, the use of fragile quartz racks is impractical. Furthermore, the use of a special
25 rack in the load-lock precludes mere insertion into the load-lock of an industry standard cassette. This requires a separate loading and unloading

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step, either at the load-lock or at a separate external location.

5 Importantly, however, heating in a load-lock presents the problem of exposure of the heated internal structures of the load-lock to atmosphere, which increases the incidence of corrosion from oxygen contact and water vapor in the air. In addition, the opening of the load-lock when the contents are hot exposes persons loading and
10 unloading the load-locks to the hazards of the high temperatures, a hazard that can be avoided at the expense of providing the machine with front-end robots, or wasting production time by allowing the load-lock to cool.

15 Notwithstanding the above efforts of the prior art, there remains a need to provide an efficient and effective method and apparatus for removing gasses and other absorbed contaminants from the surfaces and bodies of wafers in a sealed
20 environment of a processing apparatus prior to the processing of the wafers, and to do so without introducing into the process the disadvantages and hazards of the prior art.

Summary of the Invention:

25 It is a primary objective of the present invention to provide a batch preheating capability for a wafer processing machine, particularly a

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machine of the modular cluster tool type, which can preprocess the wafers while keeping both the wafers and the structure utilized for the preprocessing step out of contact with the external atmosphere.

5 It is a further objective of the present invention to provide a batch wafer pretreatment capability that will not detract from, and will add to, the speed and flexibility of the wafer processing equipment.

10 It is a more particular objective of the present invention to provide a batch preheating, degassing and desorption module for the pretreatment of silicon semiconductor wafers that communicates only with the internal environment of
15 a cluster tool during the course of its operation.

 It is a more specific objective of the present invention to provide a batch preheat module configuration for a wafer processing cluster tool that will subject wafers to prolonged controlled
20 preprocess treatment while supporting a through-put rate required by the faster processes of the machine.

 According to the principles of the present invention, there is provided a batch preheat module
25 for a cluster tool that connects to the internal environment of a wafer processing cluster tool at a point, preferably at a hub or transport module,

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maintained continuously at the inert vacuum environment of the machine beyond the load-lock.

In accordance with one preferred embodiment of the invention, there is provided a configuration of cluster tool having a plurality of batch preheat chambers, and preferably two in number, that each connect to a transport module, and preferably the same transport module, and from which transport module it is exclusively loaded and unloaded. The transport module to which the preheat chambers connect is further preferably connected to one or more load-lock modules through which the transport module is loaded and unloaded with wafers to pass them to and from the external environment, while continuously isolating the transport module from the external environment.

The pair of modules are operated such that one can be initially loaded with wafers sequentially from the transport module and then heated as a batch. While the heating is taking place, the other preheat module can be loaded in a similar way with a second batch of wafers. After the first batch of wafers has been heated for a required prolonged period of time, the wafers from it may be transferred sequentially to other processing stations and then transferred to a load-lock for removal from the machine, while the second

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batch of wafers in the second load-lock is heated. When the first preheat module has been emptied of pretreated wafers, it is refilled with a third batch of wafers, while the second preheating module is still subjecting the second batch of wafers to prolonged heating.

By prolonged heating it is meant that the preheating process time is longer, perhaps four to eight times longer, than the average time of the processes performed in the other modules of the cluster tool. Therefore, once the initial batch of wafers has been preheated in one of the pretreatment modules, wafers from one preheating module can be sequentially transferred to and returned from the other processing chambers of the machine while another batch is being preheated and made ready for subsequent processing, without adversely affecting the productivity of the machine in performing the primary processes.

According to the preferred embodiment of the invention, each of the batch preheating modules is provided with moveable quartz rack capable of holding a full standard cassette load of twenty-five silicon wafers. The rack is moveable in a vertical direction on an elevator, which brings each of the horizontal vertically spaced wafer holding slots to a position adjacent a standard

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MESA gate valve through which each one of the wafers of the batch can be loaded to or unloaded from the transport module to which the pretreatment module is connected. Preferably, two extra wafer holding positions are provided in the rack to hold dummy wafers or shields that may be provided and that have heat absorption properties that insure that the topmost and bottommost wafers will heat at the same rate as the wafers that are central to the rack. The rack controls are programmed to move the rack to load the batch of wafers without spaces or unfilled positions between them, and to move the shields if necessary should less than a full cassette of wafers be loaded into the pretreatment module for batch processing. This programming enhances the predictability and uniformity of the preheating process regardless of the size of the batch being pretreated.

The pretreatment module according to the preferred embodiment of the invention is provided with two banks of quartz IR lamps on opposite sides of the chamber, each positioned outside of a quartz window. The quartz window passes a broad band of radiant energy therethrough that includes a portion of the visible and infrared light spectrum, for heating the wafers within.

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To provide uniformity of heating, the internal surfaces of the module are preferably formed of highly reflective material such as stainless steel or similar material that may, if
5 necessary, be externally insulated or cooled. In addition, the rack is further made to rotate slowly within the preheat chamber to enhance the uniformity of the heating from the lamps.

The lamps are controlled by a temperature
10 control that responds to a temperature monitor signal from temperature sensors that do not contact the surfaces of the wafers being processed. Such sensors are preferably pyrometers, directed through windows onto surfaces of the wafers, for example
15 downwardly at the top or device surface of the top wafer, or preferably at a slightly upwardly inclined angle from the side of the chamber at the bottom or backsides of several wafers of the batch. The temperature sensors are either provided with
20 shield structure to block reflected radiation from the IR lamps from entering the sensors and to prevent detection of radiated heat from surfaces of other than the wafers being preheated. In the alternative, or in addition, the sensors are
25 selected to be responsive to radiant heat from the wafers that is of a different wavelength, for example a longer wavelength, than that from the

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lamps that passes through the quartz windows of the chamber. Alternatively, sensing the temperature may be achieved by way of a direct contact sensor on an object such as a dummy wafer within the preheating chamber. The output of such a sensor is calibrated to correlate with the actual temperature of the wafers. The controller of the lamps is further provided with logic to anticipate the heating curve of the wafers in order to more accurately control the energy to the lamps in response to feedback signals from the temperature sensors.

The present invention provides the advantages of removing surface and absorbed vapor and gaseous contaminants from silicon wafers, thereby preventing or substantially reducing the formation of defects in the coating and etching processes. The preheating of the wafers after they have entered the vacuum environment of the processing apparatus enhances the effectiveness of the pretreating process. Avoidance of exposure to the atmosphere of heated internal machine components, avoidance of exposure of operators to heated cassettes and the ability to use conventional cassettes in the load-locks result from the provision of batch preheating chamber that is only internally accessible from the inert vacuum

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environment of the machine. The invention provides improved uniformity and controllability in pretreatment of the wafers. Efficient utilization of the processing apparatus and increased productivity result from the single pretreatment module and multiple pretreatment module configurations of the invention.

These and other objectives and advantages of the present invention will be apparent from the following detailed description of the drawings in which:

Brief Description of the Drawings:

Fig. 1 is a plan diagram of a cluster tool configuration according to principles of the present invention.

Fig. 2 is an isometric view of a preprocessing module of the cluster tool of Fig. 1 according to one embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 3 is a side view, partially in cross-section, of the preprocessing module of Fig. 2.

Fig. 4 is a top cross-sectional view of the preprocessing module taken along the line 4-4 of Fig. 3.

Detailed Description of the Drawings:

Referring to Fig. 1, a cluster tool according to the preferred embodiment of the

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present invention is illustrated. The cluster tool 10 includes one or more transport modules, in this embodiment two transport modules that include a front transport module 12 and a back transport module 14. Such transport modules of this type are manufactured by Brooks Automation of North Billerica, Massachusetts as its LTS Series module. The transport modules 12, 14 are provided with vacuum pumps (not shown) to maintain their internal chambers at a vacuum pressure level suitable for the processing of semiconductor wafers. Each of the transport modules is polygon shaped, presenting a plurality of sides, each having a wafer transfer port therethrough, for the connection of a processing or wafer handling module. Each of the ports permits transfer of wafers between the interconnected modules in a vacuum environment. Each of the ports is equipped with one or more gate valves, typically MESA standard gate valves, that provide for isolation of the environments of the transfer and processing or handling modules. Such valves are provided permanently attached to the transport modules 12, 14 to allow for removal of the processing or handling modules without interruption of the vacuum of the transport modules 12, 14. A second gate valve may be provided on each of the adjoining modules to permit retention

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of the vacuum within them when they are removed from the transport module.

5 The transport modules 12, 14 are interconnected by an interconnecting conduit and aligner 16 that joins the interiors of the transport modules 12, 14 to form a common transport chamber 18 at a consistent vacuum level and of a common atmosphere. Within the transport modules 12, 14 is a wafer transport mechanism or robot arm 10 20 that rotates about a central axis of the respective module 12, 14 and extends through the ports to load and unload single wafers from the adjoining modules, including the processing modules, handling modules and the other transport 15 module.

The back transport module 14 has six module connection faces or sides for connection to six adjacent modules. On one of these sides is, in the illustrated embodiment, connected a soft etch 20 module 22 for the cleaning or mild etching preconditioning of the surfaces of wafers. A second of these sides is connected to a first sputter coating module 24, which will typically perform a sputter coating process to deposit a 25 uniform coating on the surface of the wafer, usually following the soft etch process in the module 22. Another or third side is connected to

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another processing module, a rapid thermal processing (RTP) module 26, for treating the wafer quickly with high temperatures of, for example 1000°C, to anneal or smooth a previously deposited coating, such as a metal coating deposited by a sputter coating process in the sputtering module 24. A forth side is connected to another processing module, for example a sputtering module 28, that may be a sputter etching module or another sputter coating module. A fifth face is connected to another processing module 30 that may be, for example, a chemical vapor deposition (CVD) module. The types of modules and the processes performed therein may be any process suitable to be performed on wafers in conjunction with the other processes being performed by the cluster tool. The sixth face of the transport module is connected to the aligner 16.

The front transport module 12 has five module connection faces for connection to five adjacent modules. One of these sides is connected to the module aligner 16, and two of these sides are each connected to one of two load-lock modules 32, 34 through which wafers are transferred between the chamber 18 of the transport modules 12, 14 and an external clean room environment 36. The environment 36 is separated from a controlled

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internal environment 38 that surrounds the cluster tool 10 by a sealed wall 40. The environments 36 and 38 are both at atmospheric pressure.

5 The load-locks 32, 24 each have an access door through which a standard cassette of, for example 25, wafers are held in a rack, usually made of a plastic material such as polypropylene. The racks are loaded and unloaded either manually or by robot through a load-lock access door 41 into each
10 of the load-locks 32, 34. The access doors 41, when closed, seal internal load-lock chambers within the load-locks so that they may be pumped to the vacuum environment of the transport chamber 18 to permit entry of the wafers, transferred
15 individually by the transport arm 20, into the transport chamber 18 and to the other modules of the cluster tool 10. When the transport arm 20 returns wafers to the load-locks 32, 34, the load-lock is vented to the external environment. Except
20 when the load-locks are at the vacuum pressure level of the transport chamber 18, the gate valve between the transport chamber 18 and respective load-lock 32, 34 is closed.

Connected to the other two faces of the
25 entry transport module 12 are two preferably identical batch preheating, degassing or desorption modules 42, 44. Each of these modules is equipped

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to receive, hold and preprocess a plurality of wafers simultaneously, preferably any number up to the quantity held in a full wafer cassette handled by the load-locks 32, 34.

5 The batch preheating modules 42, 44 according to certain embodiments of the present invention, will be described in relation to the module 42. Referring to Fig. 2, the preheating module 42 includes a pressure tight housing 50
10 enclosing a preheating chamber 52. The housing has a hole 53 therein to which a high vacuum pump 54 (removed in this figure; see Fig. 3) is connected to maintain the chamber 52 at a high vacuum, typically equal to that of the transport chamber
15 18. The module 42 is also conventionally provided with a second pump (not shown) for lowering the pressure from atmospheric pressure to within the operating range of the pump 54, and with a vent port (not shown) for returning the pressure within
20 the chamber 52 to that of the atmosphere. The housing 50 also has therein, on the front thereof, a rectangular port 56 to which the module is connected to a gate valve 58 (Fig. 3) of the front transport module 12.

25 On each side of the housing 50 is a rectangular quartz window 60, approximately one inch in thickness. The quartz window 60 allows the

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passage of infrared radiation into the chamber 52 to heat a batch of wafers 62 within. Within the chamber 52, the wafers 62 are supported on a quartz rack 64, formed of notched rods 66 supported on upper and lower end plates 67 and 69 respectively. The rack 64 is vertically moveable to bring a selected one of the notch positions adjacent the slot 56 for its insertion into, or removal from, the rack 64 by the transport mechanism 20.

Referring to Figs. 3 and 4, the rods 66 of the rack 64 are four in number, two of which are spaced at approximately 180° from each other, on a diameter perpendicular to the port 56. The other two of the rods 66 are positioned about 60° apart and equidistant from the other two rods on the side of the rack opposite the slot 64, when the rack 64 is in its loading and unloading position. The rack 64 is rotatably mounted in the housing 50 on a rotatable shaft 68, to which a drive motor 70, located below the housing 50, is drivably connected through a belt 72 that engages the pulley of a ball gear screw 74.

The motor 70, pump 54 and housing 50 are rigidly supported on a wheeled base 76 such that the slot 56 is at the vertical height of the gate valve 58 above floor 78 and is alignable therewith. Also rigidly mounted on the base 76 is an elevator

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drive 80 that includes a pair of motors 82, 84 connected to a gear mechanism 86 at the base of a tubular column 88 that encases a spirally geared end (not shown) of the shaft 68. The motors 82, 84 are stepping motors that raise and lower the shaft 68 to raise and lower the rack 64 to bring any selected one of the notch positions of the rods 66 into alignment with the slot 56, to load or unload wafers 62.

As illustrated in Fig. 4, the rack 64 is shown in the position at which wafers 66 can be loaded and unloaded through the slot 56 and gate valve 58. When loaded, the gate valve 58 is closed and radiant infrared light is directed into the cavity or chamber 52 through the quartz windows 60 in the sides of the housing 50 from banks of quartz IR lamps 90 mounted on the outside of the housing 50. Behind each bank of the lamps 90 is a cooled reflector 92. Each of the banks 90 includes, in the embodiment shown, eight lamps, each of approximately 2000 watts of power.

The energy to the lamp banks 90 is controlled in response to signals from one or more temperature sensors, shown as upper and lower sensors 93, 94, respectively, which are preferably pyrometers that sense temperature at a frequency other outside of the band of energy passing through

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the quartz windows 60 from the lamps 90. The sensors 93, 94 are mounted on brackets on the outside of the housing 50 and aimed through lenses or windows 96 in the housing 50. The upper sensor is directed onto the upper surface of the top one of the wafers 62. The lower sensor 94, which is the preferable sensor position, is directed upwardly at an angle of approximately 7.5 inches to the horizontal, to read the temperature of the lower surfaces, or back sides of the wafers.

The notches in the rods 66 are spaced apart about 1/2 inch, which is about twice the spacing of wafers in the cassette racks supported in the load-locks 32, 34. This additional spacing enhances the access of radiant energy from the lamps for better and more uniform heating of the wafers 66. In addition, the logic of the controller that controls the operation of the elevator drive 80 and the transport mechanism 20 is operable to maintain the stack of wafers 62 compressed, with no empty positions between any two of the wafers to be processed, to provide for better control of the preheating process and uniform heating of the wafers 62.

In addition, to provide for uniform heating of the top and bottom wafers of the stack, dummy wafers or shields may be provided in the end

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positions, which may remain in the chamber 52 or be removed with the wafer batches.

5 In the preferred sequence of operation of the preferred two load-lock, two preheat chamber embodiment, a cassette carrying the first batch of wafers to be processed is inserted into one of the load-locks 32, 34, for example load-lock 32, through its access door 41, with the gate valve that connects that load-lock to the transport
10 module 12 closed. Then the door to the load-lock 32 is closed and the internal chamber of the load-lock 32 is pumped to the vacuum pressure level of the transport chamber 18. When this level is reached, the valve from the load-lock 32 to the
15 transport chamber 18 is opened, and the wafers from the load-lock 32 are removed therefrom and transferred, one by one, to the preheating module 42.

20 At the preheating module 42, the wafers are placed into each of the positions of the rack 64 as the rack is indexed vertically by the elevator drive 80. When the rack 64 has been loaded to the capacity desired, with no open
positions between wafers, the valve 58 at the port
25 56 is closed and the lamps 90 are energized to begin heating of the chamber 52 within the module 32. As the first batch of wafers was being heated

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in the preheat module 42, a second batch of wafers was being loaded through the load-lock 34 to the other preheat module 44.

5 The heating of the first batch of wafers is sensed by the sensors 92 that directly read the temperature of the wafers 62. The energy to the lamp banks 90 is controlled in response to signals from the sensors 93, 94 to approach gradually and hold a preset preheating temperature, that is
10 typically in the range of 250°C to 500°C. The preheating process, to remove absorbed water vapor and other gasses from the wafers 62, should continue at the preset temperature for from 10 to 30 minutes.

15 When the preheating of the wafers 62 in the module is complete, the gate valve 58 is opened and the wafers are transferred, one by one, sequentially through the transport module 12 and through the conduit 16 into the back transport
20 module 14, from which each is sequenced into and out of any or all of the five process chambers 22-30 connected thereto for processing. As each of the wafers is processed, it is returned through the conduit 16 to the transport module 12 and into a
25 cassette in one of the load-locks 32, 34, preferably the same load-lock 32 by which they entered the transport module 12. While the

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transferring of the first batch of wafers is being carried out, the second batch of wafers in the preheat module 44, is being heated in a similar manner. When the second batch of wafers has been preheated, a third batch is being similarly loaded into the first preheat module 42, and the sequence continues in the same manner from batch to batch.

Configurations of the machine that include two load-locks and two preheating modules provide the greatest flexibility and highest productivity of the machine, allowing the preheating of different batches of wafers to occur at least in part simultaneously, and allowing the loading and unloading of different batches of wafers to occur at least in part simultaneously. With such a configuration, the ability of batches to bypass each other and the efficient utilization of the transport mechanisms are increased. Four batches of wafers in addition to the wafers in the transport mechanisms and processing modules can be present in the cluster tool at one time with this configuration.

Where the configuration of the machine includes only one preheating module, or one load-lock, the present invention still provides for increased efficiency and processing quality.

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In embodiments having only one load-lock, the preferred sequence of operation is to load a first cassette of wafers into the load-lock and into the internal environment, sequentially
5 transporting the first batch to a preheat module for preheating, then sequentially transporting the preheated wafers of the first batch into and out of other process modules, after which they will be returned to the load-lock for removal from the
10 machine in a cassette. Before the wafers of the first batch are returned to the load-lock, a second batch of wafers is loaded through the load-lock and placed into an empty preheating module.

If there is only one preheating module,
15 this placement occurs after the first batch of heat pretreated wafers is removed from the preheating module. When the second batch of wafers is being preheated, any or all of the steps of processing or transporting of wafers of the first batch can be
20 performed in a two preheat module configuration, and any or all of such steps subsequent to the unloading of the first batch of wafers from the preheating module can be performed in a single preheat module configuration.

25 With the above configuration and apparatus, wafers of various batches may be processed differently and follow different cycles

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through the cluster tool. Wafers of the same batch need not all follow the same course through the machine. The enhanced flexibility provided by the present invention optimizes the capabilities of programmed processing control, with increased productivity and efficiency in wafer processing.

From the above description, it will be apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art that alternatives to the embodiments described are possible without departing from the principles of the invention. Accordingly, the following is claimed:

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1. A wafer processing cluster tool
comprising:

at least one transport module enclosing
an internal volume continuously maintainable at a
5 vacuum pressure level, the transport module having
a wafer transport mechanism therein for
transferring individual wafers among a plurality of
modules in vacuum communication therewith;

a plurality of randomly accessible
10 individual wafer processing modules in vacuum
communication with the transport module, each
processing chamber being capable of performing at
least one wafer coating, etching or treating
process on a wafer in a vacuum processing chamber
15 contained therein;

at least one load-lock module enclosing a
load-lock chamber therein alternately communicable
with the internal volume of the transport module
and an external environment, the load-lock module
20 having a cassette holder therein for receiving and
presenting a loaded cassette of wafers from and to
the external environment when the chamber of the
load-lock is in communication therewith, and for
receiving and presenting individual wafers from and
25 to the internal volume of the transport module when
the chamber of the load-lock is in communication
therewith; and

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at least one batch preprocessing module
in vacuum communication with the transport module
30 and having a preprocessing chamber therein
containing a rack for holding a plurality of wafers
thereon for simultaneous preprocessing, the rack
being capable of receiving and presenting wafers
individually from and to the internal volume of the
35 transport module.

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2. The cluster tool of claim 1 further comprising:

5 a second batch preprocessing module in vacuum communication with the transport module and having a preprocessing chamber therein containing a rack for holding a plurality of wafers thereon for simultaneous preprocessing, the rack being capable of receiving and presenting wafers individually from and to the internal volume of the transport
10 module.

3. The cluster tool of claim 1 wherein the batch preprocessing module comprises:

5 a heater capable of simultaneously heating a plurality of wafers supported on the rack in the preheating chamber, and capable of maintaining the wafers in the preheating chamber at a sustained spatially uniform temperature for a time that is long with respect to the average processing time of the processing modules.

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4. The cluster tool of claim 3 wherein:
the heater includes a plurality of
radiant heating elements located outside of the
processing chamber, and

5 the preprocessing module includes a rack
rotating drive for rotating the rack with respect
to the heating elements.

5. The cluster tool of claim 3 wherein:
the heater includes a sensor capable of
generating a temperature signal responsive to the
temperature of wafers in the preprocessing chamber;
and

5 the module includes a heater control
responsive to the sensor generated temperature
signal and capable of controlling the energy
delivered to the heater in response to the
10 temperature signal.

6. The cluster tool of claim 3 wherein:
the preprocessing module includes an
elevator and an elevator control capable of
cooperating with the operation of the transport
5 mechanism to position the rack to receive batches
of wafers of varying numbers of wafers without
empty positions therebetween.

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7. The cluster tool of claim 3 wherein:

the preprocessing module includes a pair
of shields carried by the rack on the top and
bottom thereof in positions respectively
immediately above and below the positions of top
and bottom wafer holding slots thereof, the shields
being capable of rendering the heat received by
wafers in the top and bottom wafer holding slots in
the rack equal to that received by other wafers in
the rack.

5

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8. A batch preheating module for a wafer processing cluster tool comprising:

a sealed housing having a preheating chamber therein and having a port therein for the transfer of all wafers therethrough and through which the chamber is selectively maintainable in vacuum communication with a transport module of a cluster tool; and

a vertically moveable rack supported within the preheating chamber capable of holding a plurality of wafers thereon for simultaneous preheating, the rack being capable of vertical movement to receive and present wafers individually from and to an internal volume of the transport module.

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9. The preheating module of claim 8 further comprising:

a heater capable of simultaneously heating a plurality of wafers supported on the rack in the preheating chamber, the heater being capable of maintaining the wafers in the preheating chamber at a sustained spatially uniform temperature for a time that is long with respect to the average processing time of the processing modules.

10. The preheating module of claim 9 wherein:

the heater includes a plurality of radiant lamps positioned outside of the housing; and

the housing includes a window for admitting only a portion of the spectrum of energy radiated by the lamps into the preheating chamber.

11. The preheating module of claim 8 wherein:

the heater includes a plurality of radiant heating elements located outside of the processing chamber, and

the preheating module includes a rack rotating drive for rotating the rack with respect to the heating elements.

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12. The preheating module of claim 8 further comprising:

5 a sensor capable of generating a temperature signal responsive to the temperature of wafers in the preheating chamber; and

a heater control responsive to the sensor generated temperature signal and capable of controlling the energy delivered to the heater in response to the temperature signal.

13. The preheating module of claim 12 wherein:

5 the sensor includes a pyrometer that is positioned to receive energy radiated from the surface of a wafer being preheated in the preheating chamber.

14. The preheating module of claim 13 wherein:

5 the pyrometer is directed upwardly at a small angle with respect to the horizontal toward the back side of at least one wafer within the preheating chamber.

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15. The preheating module of claim 13
wherein:

the pyrometer is responsive to radiant
energy from the wafer that differs in wavelength
from the wavelength of energy admitted into the
preheating chamber from the heater.

16. The preheating module of claim 8 further
comprising:

an elevator drive and an elevator drive
control capable of cooperating with the operation
of the transport mechanism to position the rack to
receive batches of wafers of varying numbers of
wafers without empty positions therebetween.

17. The preheating module of claim 8 further
comprising:

a pair of shields carried by the rack on
the top and bottom thereof in positions
respectively immediately above and below the
positions of top and bottom wafer holding slots,
the shields being capable of rendering the heat
received by wafers in the top and bottom wafer
holding slots in the rack equal to that received by
other wafers in the rack.

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18. A method of processing wafers comprising the steps of:

a) placing wafers of a first batch in a cassette into a load-lock closed to an internal machine environment and open to an external atmospheric pressure environment, sealing the load-lock with wafers of the first batch therein from the external environment, pumping the sealed load-lock to a vacuum pressure level of the internal machine environment, and opening the pumped load-lock to the internal environment;

b) after the completion of step a), transporting wafers of the first batch one by one from the cassette in the opened load-lock and into a preheating module at the vacuum pressure level of the internal environment, sealing the first batch of wafers in the preheating module, and preheating wafers of the first batch sealed in the preheating module;

c) placing wafers of a second batch in a cassette into a load-lock closed to the internal machine environment and open to an external atmospheric pressure environment, sealing the load-lock with wafers of the second batch therein from the external environment, pumping the sealed load-lock to the vacuum pressure level of the internal

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machine environment, and opening the pumped load-lock to the internal environment;

d) after the completion of step b), opening the preheating module and removing preheated wafers of the first batch one by one therefrom in the internal environment;

e) after the completion of step c), transporting wafers of the second batch one by one from the opened load-lock into which they were placed and into a preheating module at the vacuum pressure level of the internal environment, sealing wafers of the second batch in the preheating module, and preheating wafers of the second batch sealed in the preheating module; then

f) while wafers of the second batch are being preheated in a preheating module in accordance with step e), sequentially transporting preheated wafers of the first batch through a plurality of processing modules in selective communication with the internal environment; and

g) after the completion of step f), loading, one by one, wafers of the first batch that have been sequentially processed in accordance with step f) into a load-lock, sealed from the external environment and open to the internal environment.

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19. The method of claim 18 wherein:

the preheating module of steps b) and d) is a first preheating module and the preheating module of steps e) and f) is a second preheating module, whereby any of the recited steps and substeps thereof to be performed on wafers of the first batch can be performed while wafers of the second batch are being preheated in the first preheating module, and whereby any of the recited steps and substeps thereof to be performed on wafers of the second batch can be performed while wafers of the first batch are being preheated in the first preheating module.

20. The method of claim 18 wherein:

the load-lock of step a) is a first load-lock and the load-lock of step c) is a second load-lock, whereby any of the recited steps and substeps thereof to be performed on wafers of the first batch can be performed while wafers of the second batch are being loaded from or unloaded to the external environment, and whereby any of the recited steps and substeps thereof to be performed on wafers of the second batch can be performed while wafers of the first batch are being loaded from or unloaded to the external environment.

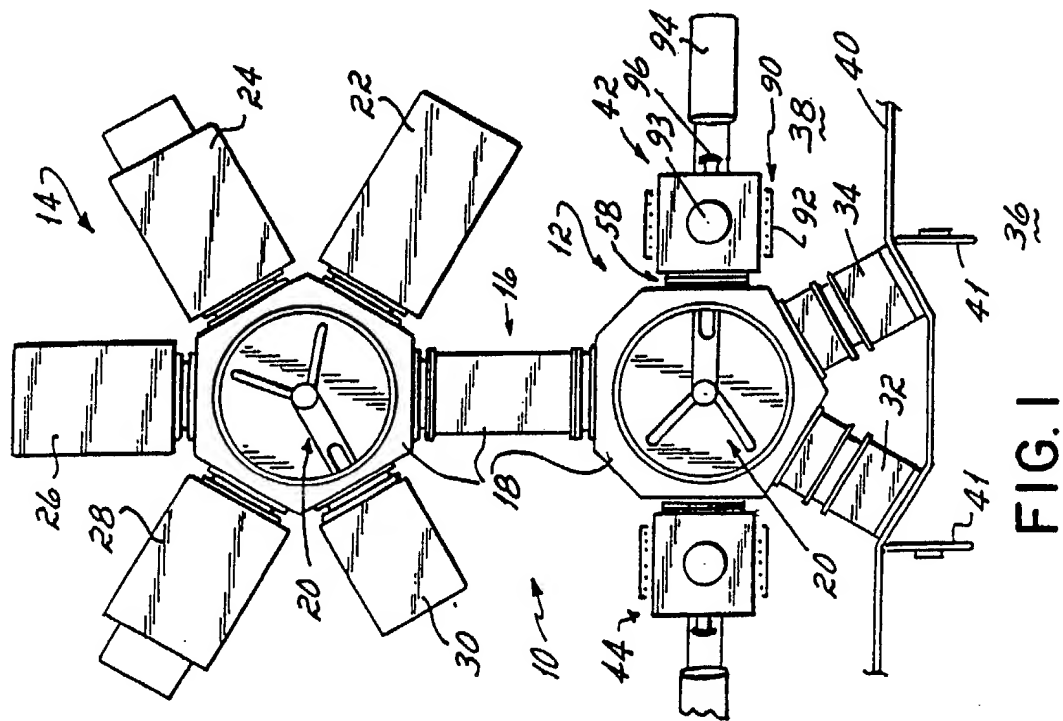


FIG. 1

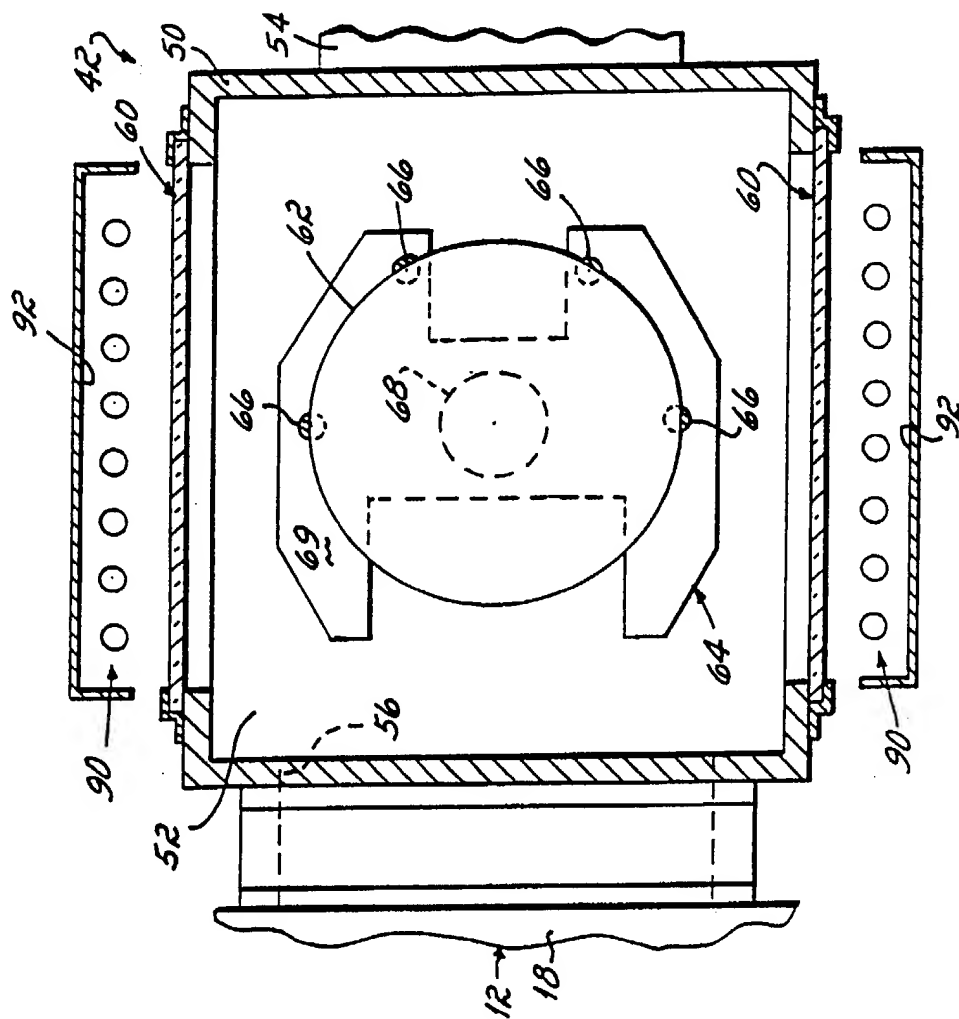


FIG. 4

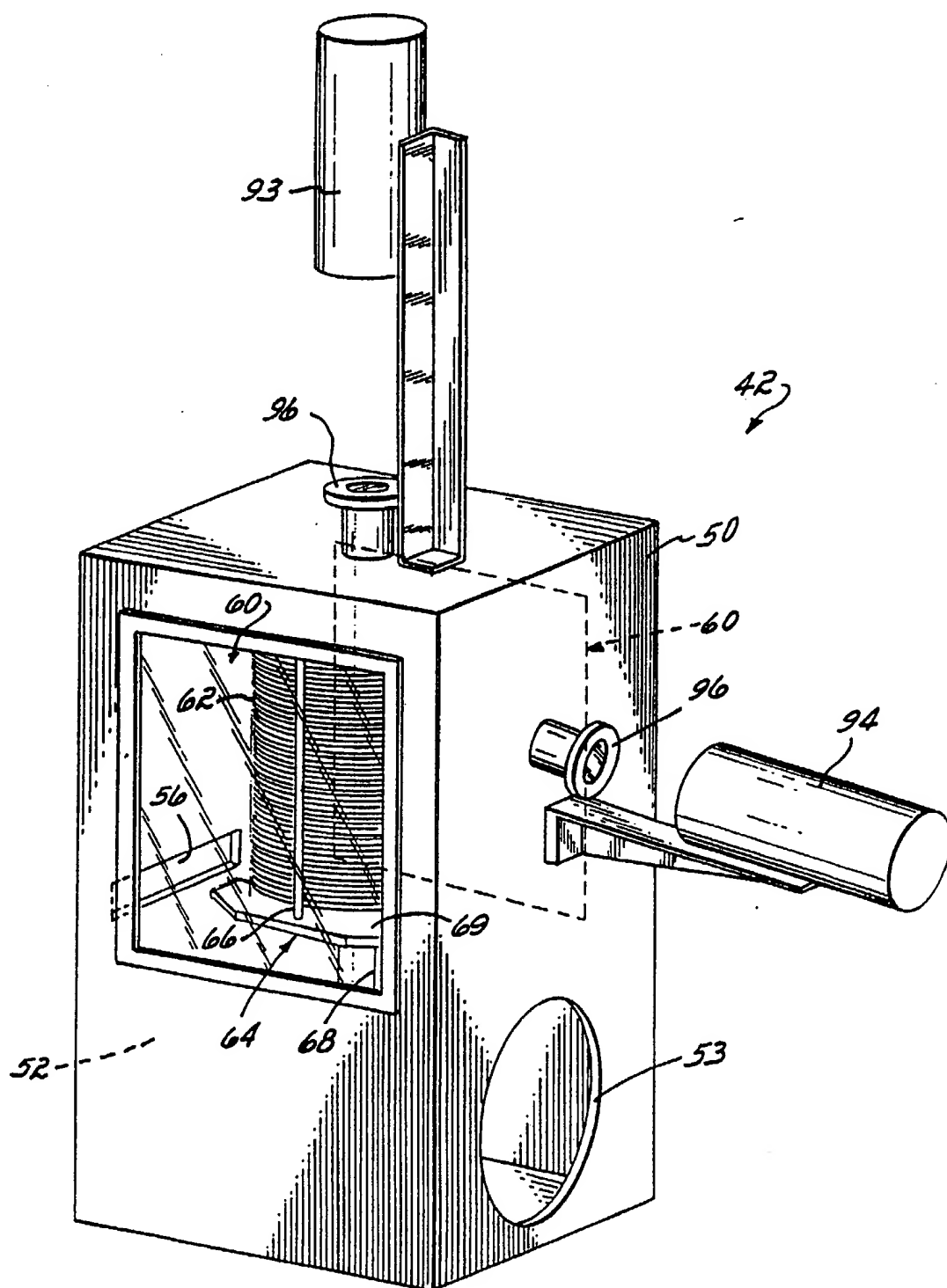
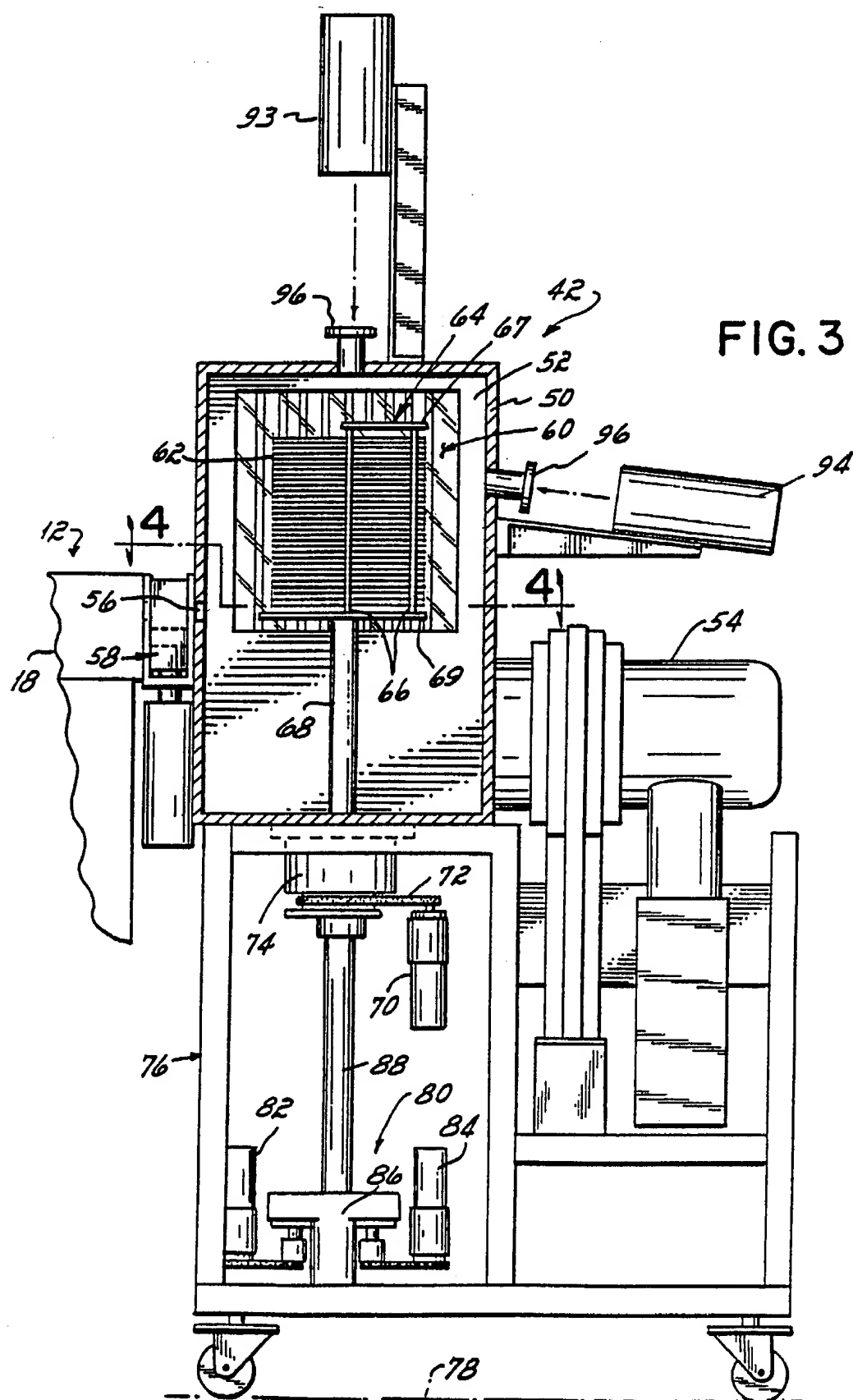


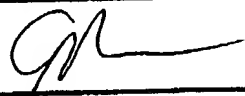
FIG. 2



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/US 92/00485

I. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER (If several classification symbols apply, indicate all) ⁶		
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both National Classification and IPC		
Int.Cl. 5 H01L21/00		
II. FIELDS SEARCHED		
Minimum Documentation Searched ⁷		
Classification System	Classification Symbols	
Int.Cl. 5	H01L	
Documentation Searched other than Minimum Documentation to the Extent that such Documents are Included in the Fields Searched ⁸		
III. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT⁹		
Category ¹⁰	Citation of Document, ¹¹ with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages ¹²	Relevant to Claim No. ¹³
X	WO,A,9 010 949 (ASM EUROPE BV) 20 September 1990	1,2,8
A	see page 5, line 3 - page 6, line 33; figures 1-2B	3,6,9, 16,18
A	EP,A,0 398 365 (APPLIED MATERIALS INC) 22 November 1990 see column 6, line 1 - column 6, line 30; figure 1	1,18
A	GB,A,2 223 470 (SILICON VALLEY GROUP) 11 April 1990 see page 8, line 7 - page 8, line 22; figure 1	8,16
A	EP,A,0 335 421 (KABUSHIKI KAISHA TOSHIBA) 4 October 1989 see column 2, line 40 - column 3, line 7; figure 3	8,9
<p>¹⁰ Special categories of cited documents:</p> <p>"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance</p> <p>"E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date</p> <p>"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)</p> <p>"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means</p> <p>"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed</p> <p>"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention</p> <p>"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step</p> <p>"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.</p> <p>"A" document member of the same patent family</p>		
IV. CERTIFICATION		
Date of the Actual Completion of the International Search	Date of Mailing of this International Search Report	
26 OCTOBER 1992	30. 10. 92	
International Searching Authority	Signature of Authorized Officer	
EUROPEAN PATENT OFFICE	BOLDER G. 	

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US 92/00485

Box I Observations where certain claims were found unsearchable (Continuation of Item 1 of first sheet)

This international search report has not been established in respect of certain claims under Article 17(2)(a) for the following reasons:

1. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to subject matter not required to be searched by this Authority, namely:

2. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to parts of the international application that do not comply with the prescribed requirements to such an extent that no meaningful international search can be carried out, specifically:

3. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they are dependent claims and are not drafted in accordance with the second and third sentences of Rule 6.4(a).

Box II Observations where unity of invention is lacking (Continuation of Item 2 of first sheet)

This International Searching Authority found multiple inventions in this international application, as follows:

1. Claims 1-7, 18-20
2. Claims 8-17

For further information please see form PCT/ISA/206 mailed 07.07.1992.

1. ☒ As all required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers all searchable claims.
2. ☐ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fee, this Authority did not invite payment of any additional fee.
3. ☐ As only some of the required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers only those claims for which fees were paid, specifically claims Nos.:

4. ☐ No required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant. Consequently, this international search report is restricted to the invention first mentioned in the claims; it is covered by claims Nos.:

Remark on Protest

- ☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest.
☒ No protest accompanied the payment of additional search fees.

**ANNEX TO THE INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT
ON INTERNATIONAL PATENT APPLICATION NO.**

US 9200485
SA 56834

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned international search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on
The European Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information. 26/10/92

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
WO-A-9010949	20-09-90	NL-A- 8900544	01-10-90
		EP-A- 0473594	11-03-92
		JP-T- 4504929	27-08-92
EP-A-0398365	22-11-90	JP-A- 3019252	28-01-91
GB-A-2223470	11-04-90	US-A- 4770590	13-09-88
		DE-A- 3715601	19-11-87
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		FR-A- 2606499	13-05-88
		GB-A, B 2190345	18-11-87
		JP-A- 63024615	02-02-88
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		US-A- 5029554	09-07-91

Wafer processing cluster tool batch preheating and degassing apparatus

Wafer processing cluster tool batch preheating and degassing apparatus

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Inventor(s): EDWARDS RICHARD C (US); KOLESA MICHAEL S (US); ISHIKAWA HIROICHI (US)

Applicant(s): MATERIALS RESEARCH CORP (US)

Requested Patent: ☐ WO9221144

Application Number: US19910701800 19910517

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IPC Classification: H01L21/00; H01L21/02; C23C16/00

EC Classification: H01L21/00S2H6, H01L21/00S2Z

EC Classification: H01L21/00S2H6, H01L21/00S2Z

Equivalents: AU1270092, CA2102197, ☐ EP0584077 (WO9221144), JP2729106B2, JP6507524T, KR251824

Abstract

A wafer processing cluster tool, having one or more load-locks, is provided with one or more batch preheating modules that receive wafers only from the cluster tool transport module at the internal vacuum pressure of the machine. The loading, unloading, handling and processing of wafers in the machine can occur while other wafers are being preheated. The preheat module has a vertically moveable rack and is loaded with various sized batches of wafers with no vacant positions between them. Wafer shaped shields may occupy positions adjacent top and bottom wafers to cause them to heat the same as other wafers in the rack. Infrared lamps positioned outside of quartz windows heat wafers in the preheat module. The rack may rotate to improve heating uniformity. Temperature sensors, such as pyrometers, that do not contact the wafers being preheated, measure temperature for control of the heating of the lamps.